



church and society

*Advocating for
Peace and Justice*

Clayton Childers

Neal Christie

Kelli Waters Taylor

For the General Board of Church and Society

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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Some paragraph numbers for and language in the Book of Discipline may have changed in the 2008 revision, which was published after these Guidelines were printed. We regret any inconvenience.

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Welcome

You are so important to the life of the Christian church! You have consented to join with other people of faith who, through the millennia, have sustained the church by extending God's love to others. You have been called and have committed your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to a position of leadership. This Guideline will help you understand the basic elements of that ministry within your own church and within The United Methodist Church.

Called to Spiritual Leadership

Each person is called to ministry by virtue of his or her baptism, and that ministry takes place in all aspects of daily life, in and outside the church. As a pastoral leader or leader among the laity, your ministry is not just a "job," but a spiritual endeavor. You *are* a spiritual leader now, and others will look to you for spiritual leadership. What does this mean?

First, *all* persons who follow Jesus are called to grow spiritually through the practice of various Christian habits (or "means of grace") such as prayer, Bible study, private and corporate worship, acts of service, Christian conferencing, and so on. Jesus taught his disciples practices of spiritual growth and leadership that you, as a disciple, are to share with others as they look to you to be a model and guide.

Second, it means that you always keep your eye on the main reasons for any ministry—to help others grow to a mature faith in God that moves them to action on behalf of others, especially "the least" (see Matthew 25:31-46). This is an aspect of "disciple making," which is the ultimate goal of all that we do in the church.

CULTIVATING VISION AND MISSION

As a spiritual leader, a primary function you carry is to help those you lead to see as clearly as possible what God is calling your church to be and to do. Ideally, your church council first forms this vision and then forms plans and goals for how to fulfill that vision. As a leader, you will help your team remain focused and accountable to honor the vision and goals to which the church is committed. You will help your team create and evaluate suggestions, plans, and activities against the measure: *Does this move us closer to our church's vision to bring others to God in this place and time?*

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING

While there are appropriate and useful business-like practices that apply to church life, Christian practices distinguish the church as the church. In the United Methodist tradition, how we meet and work together is important. “Christian Conferencing” involves listening not only to each other, but also listening intently for the will of God in any given task or conversation. This makes prayer essential in the midst of “business as usual.” As Christians, we are called to “speak the truth in love.” This is a special way to speak in which we treat one another as if each of us were Christ among us. As a spiritual leader in your ministry area, you have the privilege and opportunity to teach and model these practices. By remembering that each of us is beloved of God and discerning the presence of God in all that the church does, every task becomes worshipful work.

THE MISSION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church, which means in part that every local church is interrelated through the structure and organization of districts, conferences, jurisdictions, and central conferences in the larger “family” of the denomination. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* describes, among other things, the ministry of all United Methodist Christians, the essence of servant ministry and leadership, how to organize and accomplish that ministry, and how our connectional structure works (see especially ¶¶125–138).

Our Church is more than a structure; it is a living organism. The *Discipline* describes our mission to proclaim the gospel and to welcome people into the body of Christ, to lead people to a commitment to God through Jesus Christ, to nurture them in Christian living by various means of grace, and to send persons into the world as agents of Jesus Christ (¶122). Thus, through you—and many other Christians—this very relational mission continues.

(For help in addition to this Guideline and the Book of Discipline, see “Resources” at the end of your Guideline, www.umc.org, and the other websites listed on the inside back cover.)

Leading Your Congregation to Engage the World

You are a leader in your local congregation's Church and Society ministry. This is an important job. You are a key player in the task of leading your church to move outside its walls to engage the difficult issues facing your community and the world. How can you lead your congregation to make a positive contribution to society?

What Is the Mission of the Church?

Our United Methodist bishops have defined the mission of the church as follows: "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." This definition of the church's work goes a long way in helping us see that our faith is not just about us, it's about making a positive difference in a troubled world. How can the ministry of Church and Society support the church's mission? Let's explore this question in light of the Bible and our Wesleyan heritage.

Our Biblical-Theological Foundation

Be Positive! Painting the Vision of a Preferred Future

Some years ago in a conference hosted by the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) a staff member of one annual conference issued a challenge: "I wish you would talk more about what you are for and not always about what you're against." While there is certainly a place for stating clearly what the church stands against, it is also true that often by stating our positions in positive ways we are able to gather the church together to be a part of doing something significant.

Jesus, as seen in the Gospels, is our model for this approach. Jesus often said, "The kingdom of God is like . . ." Over and over Jesus began his teaching with this phrase to paint a picture of a preferred future and to invite people to join in the task of making it happen. "This is what the kingdom is like." Now, how do we make that kingdom a reality right now, right here, "on earth as it is in heaven"? Answering this question continues to be the church's challenge today: How do we make the reign of God a reality right now where we live?

Consider some of the current issues that we face in our world: war, violence, poverty, immigration, government corruption, global warming, pollution, crime, greed, racism, addiction. These realities and others like them confront and sometimes overwhelm us. Lasting solutions to these problems require serious changes by both individuals and society. Change can be threatening. One aspect of Church and Society work is simply the hard work of holding up a mirror that allows the church and the community to actually see the brokenness all around us. Surely God cannot be pleased with much of the picture in today's mirror. God promises healing for the world.

The church's task is to join in the healing work of God in the world. Sometimes this work involves taking stands that may not be popular. For instance, working to overcome a system that perpetuates poverty might involve calling for a living wage that empowers people to provide for their needs without charity. Such a change can be threatening to people who benefit from the current low wage structure (indeed, all consumers). Yet, we must also ask, "Is it fair to expect people to work full time at any job and not have enough pay to live a dignified life?"

The late George Outen, former general secretary for the GBCS, said: "Jesus got into trouble, and so will we, for attempting to transform society rather than to conform to it. But if we name the Name, and if we are followers of The Way, we are called to engage in the redemption of the social order. We are to help bring healing and wholeness to a broken world."

Foundations for Social Involvement

John Wesley practiced and preached a four-pronged approach to Christian faith that includes social involvement. This approach has become known as the Wesley Quadrilateral. He applied Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason to his positions. Traditionally, The United Methodist Church uses Scripture not literally but as a Holy Spirit-inspired instructive guide to becoming faithful. While Scripture is central to faithful action and decision making, it is also a resource for study and interpretation, tested by tradition, experience, and reason. Therefore, you also can test all the work you do as a Church and Society ministry team against the Wesley Quadrilateral.

SCRIPTURE

As part of the body of Christ, we are called to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities,

against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:10-12).

There are numerous biblical references to helping the poor, the outcast, and the orphan. Take a moment with your ministry team and list as many references as you can find. Which one speaks most powerfully to you?

Through his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul tells the church universal that, as we work, we will be “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

The Gospel of Luke speaks of duties and sacrifices: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19).

Likewise, Matthew records Jesus’ call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, find shelter for the homeless, minister to the sick and the imprisoned, and welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35-40). Matthew also teaches that our social action will sometimes create division. Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother” (Matthew 10:34-35).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, notes that Luke speaks of the joy of preaching forgiveness while requiring repentance, and of the grace of God reflected in social action. The “Song of Mary” expresses this joy and grace: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. . . . He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:46-53).

As Bishop Kenneth L. Carder has written in his book *Sermons on United Methodist Beliefs*, “The Bible remains the primary tool we use to approach the thorny issues of our time.” Carder suggests that as we work on today’s issues, this sacred tool provides a foundation of truth: In Creation stories showing the interrelatedness of all the earth, in the prophets’ calls for justice, in Jesus’ love for all humanity, in Paul’s letters instructing the churches, and in the vision of God’s shalom calling us to act to ensure justice for all people.

TRADITION

Since the days when John Wesley declared that the world was his parish, Methodists have put into action his belief that “one cannot minister by proxy.” Members of The United Methodist Church have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles.

For instance, early members of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) expressed their opposition to slavery, to smuggling, and to cruel treatment of prisoners.

In 1908, the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) adopted a social creed. Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and by the Methodist Protestant Church. The EUB Church adopted a statement of social principles in 1946, when the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church united.

In 1972, four years after the 1968 union of the EUB Church and Methodist Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which has been slightly revised by successive General Conferences every four years since.

The Preface of the Social Principles provides a succinct description of the purpose of this important document:

The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

In addition, the United Methodist General Conference passes resolutions that are published in *The Book of Resolutions*. The Social Principles and the resolutions form the foundation for United Methodist involvement in social issues. The *2008 Book of Discipline* and *The Book of Resolutions* are available from The United Methodist Publishing House.

REASON

“If Christ’s life was not political, then what was it?” asks South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his book *Hope and Suffering*. Members of the body of Christ are called to reflect on the meaning of social justice and its implications for our involvement in social justice ministry.

Justice, says social ethicist Walter Brueggemann, is finding out what belongs to whom and giving it back to them.

“So do not lightly read of Jesus’ intention to bring good news to the poor by failing to think about what is good news to a poor person,” said George Outen. “Let the church not gloss over the upheavals caused by releasing the captives and liberating the oppressed. Things are never the same when the blind receive their sight and the brokenhearted are healed.”

As the *Book of Discipline* states so clearly (§104):

By reason we read and interpret Scripture.

By reason we determine whether our Christian witness is clear.

By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God’s action and will.

By reason we organize the understandings that compose our witness and render them internally coherent.

By reason we test the congruence of our witness to the biblical testimony and to the traditions which mediate that testimony to us.

By reason we relate our witness to the full range of human knowledge, experience, and service.

EXPERIENCE

The statement on “Our Theological Task” (§104) in the *Book of Discipline* notes wisely:

Our experience interacts with Scripture. We read Scripture in light of the conditions and events that help shape who we are, and we interpret our experience in terms of Scripture. . . . Christian experience . . . confirms the biblical message for our present. It illumines our understanding of God and creation, and motivates us to make sensitive moral judgments.

Although profoundly personal, Christian experience is also corporate; our theological task is informed by the experience of the Church and by the common experiences of all humanity. In our attempt to understand the biblical message, we recognize that God’s gift of liberating love embraces the whole of creation.

For example, many Christians are acting to oppose the continuing spread of legalized gambling. Their reading of Scripture reveals the biblical mandate to conserve the resources and gifts, including money, that God has granted us. The United Methodist Church from its earliest days has traditionally opposed gambling as an evil “menace to society” and to individuals. The church’s objection is based on the destructive nature of seeking material gain by chance and at the expense of a neighbor.

The church's experience, as well as the experience of individuals, reveals that greed impoverishes persons who seek to obtain "something for nothing," contributes to the breakdown of families and communities, and even erodes good government.

Combine all the above, and it is clear why The United Methodist Church, along with many other faith communities, has opposed gambling.

Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience should move every Church and Society ministry team and for that matter every concerned Christian into efforts to protect the basic human rights and dignity of all persons, and to uplift people who are poor and exploited.

The Ministry of Church and Society

What Is the Mission of the General Board of Church and Society?

The purpose of the GBCS is threefold: (1) to connect the work of the General Board with the annual conferences and local churches, (2) to connect ministries of mercy with ministries of justice, ministries of charity with ministries that promote systemic change, (3) to continue to be a voice for justice in the corridors of power on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, and at the United Nations in New York. Fulfilling these tasks requires the faithful support of a network of Church and Society advocates across The United Methodist Church connection, whereby church and society leaders receive needed resources, know whom to call, and are inspired and enabled to be about the work of God in their communities and beyond. It is important that all church and society leaders be familiar with the work of the GBCS and be able to find support for their work through its many resources. Many of these are available for free online at www.umc-gbcs.org.

Church and Society Ministry in the Local Church

The *Book of Discipline*, United Methodism's book of law, spells out what your congregation can expect from you. Get a copy from your pastor and read the Social Principles and the sections related to your work as Church and Society chairpersons. The *Discipline* ¶254 suggests that you keep your church council aware of the needs for study and action on a variety of issues; recommend to the church council social concerns study and/or action

projects; cooperate with other ministry teams in your congregation to survey the needs of the local community and to make program recommendations that will help your church respond to local, community, state, national, and international needs; and stay in contact with district, conference, and general church groups working on social issues and providing action suggestions and educational resources.

In addition to studying the Social Principles, carefully read ¶¶217–221 of the *Book of Discipline* on “The Meaning of Membership.” Make ¶221 the watchword of your team’s ministry: “Each member of The United Methodist Church is to be a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community.”

KEY TASKS TO CONSIDER

Your personal volunteer work-style will determine what you do. However, you undoubtedly will perform certain key tasks. These are the kinds of activities that you will be doing:

Administering—the ministry team’s programs, activities, meetings, minutes, materials, budget.

Facilitating—the ministry team’s action proposals to the church council; your church’s social involvement activities.

Researching—to find data on social issues; resource persons, agencies, materials; community needs; congregational attitudes, skills, and willingness to be involved.

Communicating—about social issues, educational events, community speakers, public meetings, positions of The United Methodist Church, actions of your annual conference and/or of the General Conference.

Educating—your congregation about the Social Principles and the General Conference positions on social issues found in *The Book of Resolutions* and about important justice issues in your community, state, and nation.

Acting—to carry out programs that the church council has assigned to the ministry team; to implement programs on a variety of issues on local, state, and national levels through advocacy.

Witnessing—in your church and community about issues on which your congregation, annual conference, or General Conference has taken a stand.

Engaging the Local Church and the World

What Is an Advocate?

Our word “Advocate” is derived from the Latin root word “vocare” which means “to call.” An “Advocate” can be understood as “one who pleads the cause of another.” This is a high calling. We, as Christians, are called to let our voices be heard, to speak up, and to “resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves” (United Methodist Baptismal Covenant).

Building a Holistic Ministry of Advocacy

As you engage in advocacy ministry keep three goals in mind:

1. *Relate.* Take time to build relationships with other key members of your church and community. Most people will be willing to hear your perspective if you take time to develop a positive, respectful relationship with them.
2. *Educate.* People you work with will want to clearly understand why an issue is important before they are willing to get involved. Take time to lay the groundwork. The more people understand, the more enthusiastic they will be as advocates.
3. *Act.* It is not enough just to study social issues and to discuss them among ourselves. We need to become a part of the public witness and advocacy process. Send a card or letter to legislators. Make phone calls. Write a letter to the editor. Talk to friends and neighbors. Take a stand. Let your voice be heard.

Salvation = Healing

The Greek word used in the New Testament for “salvation” can also be translated as “healing.” This is important to properly understand this important concept. For instance, in John 3:17 Jesus says, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved (healed) through him.”

Healing often takes time. Healing involves different prescriptions for different people and different symptoms. Illness is often the result, not of individual failure, but of poor living conditions in the entire community. Holistic healing involves one’s whole being, mind, body, and spirit. Indeed, holistic healing should not be limited to the individual but should reach out to include one’s whole community. How might this understanding of salvation as healing affect the way we do ministry in the church and the world?

Advocacy and Prayer

Most of the Means of Grace John Wesley mentioned related to spiritual renewal. Faithful advocacy requires spiritual nourishment. It is important for you as a Church and Society leader to tend your spiritual life. Advocacy can be draining. At times it can be frustrating. We need help from God to do this work. Make time for daily spiritual prayer and enrichment. Share honestly and openly with God the challenges of your life. Pray for guidance in your role as a church leader. Pray for team members by name who share your work and remember the tasks that need to be done.

Pray for your church and community. Pray as you read the newspaper for the issues and challenges that lie therein. Pray for your community as you travel through the streets. Pray for those who assume roles of leadership. Remember community leaders in prayer but also pray for state, national, and world leaders. Your commitment to prayer will enable you to advocate for change and to value those whose positions differ from your own.

Advocacy and Worship

The act of worship is central to who we are as a church community. How we conduct worship reveals much about our identity. Visitors often watch to see if the values the church proclaims are expressed in the way the church worships. Be sensitive to roles of leadership during worship: Who collects the offering in your church? Who says the prayers? Who reads the Scripture? Who preaches? Does the worship leadership in your church reflect the diversity of people in your church and community? Do you see diversity of age, race, gender, ethnic backgrounds? How is the church's role as a place of hospitality embracing all God's people reflected in the worship service? Do people feel welcome in your church community? Are the hymns and litanies supportive of the church's call to be ministers of peace and reconciliation in the world, or do they reinforce violent or parochial images of God?

Special Sundays Related to Church and Society

Worship also offers an excellent opportunity for the people of God to join with United Methodists throughout the world in special worship offering and service themes that support Church and Society ministry. How many of these did your congregation celebrate last year? Are there things you can do to promote these special services for next year?

Human Relations Day (the Sunday before the national observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday) strengthens United Methodist outreach to

communities in the United States and Puerto Rico, encouraging ministries of social justice.

Peace with Justice Sunday (first Sunday after Pentecost) enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. Because of the special offering that is received on Peace with Justice Sunday, global outreach through the GBCS and annual conference-related peace with justice ministries transform lives.

Other Special Days that Support Church and Society Work

Festival of God's Creation/Earth Day Sunday (the Sunday closest to Earth Day, April 22) is a collaboration of GBCS working with the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group to produce *Festival of God's Creation* resource materials to help congregations celebrate and promote stewardship of God's creation.

United Nations Sunday (last Sunday of October) is a day for which the United Methodist Office for the United Nations prepares resources to commemorate the founding of the United Nations. These resources may be used by local churches, Sunday schools, and adult study groups. For the entire month of October, we give focus to the joint campaign by the UN Fund for UNICEF and the General Board of Church and Society to undertake Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF.

Global HIV/AIDS Day (December 1) affirms our unity with brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering from and ministering to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. We not only provide health care to the sick but also work to change public policies that inadequately address HIV/AIDS.

What Does Justice Mean Anyway?

Church youth groups often visit the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, to learn about the ministry of the GBCS. As they enter the building, they are able to see the classic Bible passage for Micah 6:8 engraved on the wall in the building's rotunda: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Often, groups viewing the passage are asked: "What is justice anyway? What does it mean when it says to 'do justice'?" One young woman, a 15-year-old from St. Louis, Missouri, replied, "Justice is making the world look the way Jesus would want it to look if he were here."

While charity or mercy tends to focus on immediate recognizable needs and short-term answers to long-term problems, justice focuses on long-term change. While charity is often reactive, justice is proactive; it goes “upstream” to address the root cause of issues.

Mercy depends on our benevolence. But justice has to do with fairness and with what people deserve. Mercy can be withdrawn from those to whom we offer it whenever we choose. But justice results from social structures that guarantee human dignity, moral rights, and stewardship of God’s creation. Mercy can include one-time donations for natural disasters, food baskets, or clothes for the homeless. Mercy can view people as objects to be tended to rather than as persons with assets that the larger community needs. Mercy often makes decisions without consulting the very people who will be affected by its giving. Mercy can preoccupy our time and talents to the point that we are too weary to imagine a world of justice. Mercy moves us to empathize. Mercy rarely offends anyone, while justice usually offends someone!

Advocacy goes the next mile by intervening on behalf of the least and the last and the lost with government officials and power brokers, drafting legislation and working for systemic change. Mercy without advocacy may reassure voters and policy makers that the problem is being addressed; but the response is inadequate when there is no real change in the system creating the problem in the first place. Advocacy includes people-to-people dialogue as solutions are determined together. Advocacy means organizing communities to represent the interests of those least represented, boycotting products that harm people, deciding fair purchases based on fair trade and employment practices, cancelling debt or rejecting policies based on privilege of race, sex and sexuality, ethnicity, language, class, physical and mental ability. Justice depends on the advocacy of people, congregations, and institutions.

Advocacy and Missions

People want to be able to act on their faith. One way many Christians translate faith into action is through volunteering for mission projects in their communities and beyond. People can find a new place in the life of the church through mission trips. Youth can find new meaning in life by taking time from their summer vacations to be involved in voluntary mission service. Such projects offer an excellent opportunity for discussion on the root causes of problems that plague our communities and foster an environment conducive to deeper analysis and critical thinking. Consider these questions as examples: Why is it that so many people in our community are homeless in the first place? What does this say about the availability of jobs that pay a

living wage? What might this teach us about our community's provision of mental health-care services? Is the homelessness problem related to the fact that so many people lack adequate health insurance and that experiencing a health-care crisis is a major cause of bankruptcies in the United States?

How have poor communities in developing countries been affected by global policies that limit or undermine their economic development? Who benefits from the current system? Who pays the price for these policies? These questions and others like them are challenging to address, and leaders should prepare carefully to engage others in this discussion.

Careful research can add to the "hands on" mission experience by providing an important educational component. Sometimes mission projects happen in the aftermath of great tragedies such as a tsunami or tornado. But many times projects result from ongoing societal failures that demand careful analysis, education, advocacy, and action. How can you support your missions committee in its work of addressing critical needs from a holistic perspective? It has been said that every service opportunity should be accompanied by prayer. It might also be said that every service project should be accompanied by social justice advocacy.

Advocacy and Evangelism

There are many people who have disregarded the church because they have not yet heard the whole message of God. Many have not yet heard that God passionately loves the world and that we, as God's people, are called to be faithful stewards of all creation. Many have not yet heard that Jesus Christ is prince of peace and that we are called to be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation in a world addicted to violence. Many have not yet heard that we as God's people are called to love all of God's creation: inviting and welcoming every person in grace and love to worship and serve God.

Remember the story of a savior who opens his arms wide on the cross and in so doing proclaims the message that "there is nothing you can do to me to make me stop loving you." How can we reach religion's "cultured despisers," compassionate but secular people who might only think of the church at best as "irrelevant" or at worst as an "opiate of the people"? How do we connect with the masses of people who see the church as being preoccupied with "pie in the sky, by and by" and unconcerned about transforming the here and now? Though we may know that this is not the true essence of the church, many people see it as reality. Their understanding of Christianity has been shaped by what they see or hear on television. They need to hear the rest of the Christian story. Commit to "whole story" evangelism: faithful witnessing in word and deed that tells the whole story of Jesus and the good news he proclaimed.

Understanding the Gospel Message

The Greek word *euangelion*, translated into English as “gospel” or “good news,” was not a common word in the Roman society in which the early church was formed. However, the word was often used in reference to the proclamations that were issued from the Emperor’s office. These “press releases” might have read something like this: “The good news from the Emperor today is that unemployment is down, the stock market is up, the war in the east is going well,” and so on. What does this say about the political nature of the early church’s message? Jesus’ followers speaking of the “good news of Jesus Christ” threatened the controlling powers of the day.

Likewise, the phrase “Jesus is Lord” was adopted as the earliest confession of faith embraced by the church. This profession ran counter to the profession of allegiance expected of every Roman official: “Caesar is Lord.” Some emperors even professed to possess a “divine” nature. Surely, the Christian movement was a countercultural threat in a society that widely accepted a divine understanding of the emperor’s nature and role.

Recalling the Public Ministry of Jesus

A significant portion of Jesus’ ministry was conducted in the city squares, roads, villages, hillsides, lakes and plains, not in the synagogues or temple. Where is our ministry happening as a church? Where is our energy expended? How are we extending the ministry of the church out into our daily lives at work, at school, in community service, in political action and advocacy? Are we following in the footsteps of Jesus if we fail to go out into the “highways and byways” where he spent so much of his time? Jesus lived among the people and most of his recorded encounters happened in people’s homes, in marketplaces, on hillsides and seashores and open roads, not in the temple or synagogue.

Effective Ministry in the Community

Ministry that extends the work of the church into the world does not have to be heavy-handed. Extension ministry happens best in community, through the hard work of building relationships which are respectful of differences but bound together by a common commitment to see the needs of one’s community and all of the community’s people addressed. By being a committed citizen, an active participant in the community, an engaged member of the Parent Teacher Association, a faithful volunteer on a community board or agency, one can extend the work of Christ into the world. In this way Christians actually become the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” to which Jesus referred in the Sermon on the Mount. Through faith-

ful community involvement, our commitment to the way of Christ can provide a healthy influence to a wide variety of community organizations. We need to be creative as we think of ways we can extend the ministry of the local church into the “public squares” of our world. Ask yourself: What are our community’s greatest needs? What are our particular gifts? What resources do we bring to the table? How can our congregation be of service? The next question may very well be, “Where should we begin?”

Steps to Action

ever wonder why people don’t take action? Why is it that so many people when confronted by clear information about injustice choose to turn away and do nothing? Often a lack of action is caused by a lack of resources. Here is a simple example of one way that you as church and society leader could take one issue and move people from awareness to action.

1. **AWARENESS**—Many people have a vague awareness of the problem but no real sense of the facts or its relevance to their lives. We must find creative connections between the issues we are passionate about and the people we are trying to reach. For example: My niece has asthma and I know it has something to do with the air she is breathing . . . I want to do something to help her.

2. **KNOWLEDGE**—To move people to action we must connect their awareness with knowledge: equip them with facts and information that is accurate and directly relevant. For example: Power plant pollution in your neighborhood is a direct contributor to poor air quality and increased asthma attacks.

3. **VALUES/ETHICS**—The church must play a critical role in connecting a value or ethic or moral to the facts. Here we give voice to the values that shape who we are as people of faith. People are more apt to act on information if it touches them on a deeper level. For example: Our faith teaches us to care for creation and for our neighbors. How can we as Christians allow pollution to destroy the earth and harm our brothers and sisters?

4. **DEVELOP SKILLS**—The next step is to empower people for action: to give them skills they need to act on the knowledge they now have. For example: Provide information on where to purchase compact fluorescent bulbs to reduce energy use, how to switch to green energy options if available, or how to contact elected officials to advocate for tighter emission controls.

5. **ACTION!** Following steps 1–4, people are equipped to take action. Actions can/should include a range of personal, congregational, and community options for engagement on the issue. With each action comes growing awareness and knowledge so the cycle of steps can begin all over again.

What Not to Do

Do not lead your church to endorse particular candidates or parties or support them with the church's resources. This would put the congregation's tax-exempt status at risk. Instead, focus on issues. What are the issues we need to be concerned about as people of faith? How can we add our voices to the public debate? How can we become advocates for God's Shalom in our community and throughout the world?

ATTRACTING TEAM MEMBERS FOR CHURCH AND SOCIETY MINISTRY

Working on issues of peace and justice in isolation can lead to burnout. God in Christ calls us to express our faith through community. Each person has a role and responsibility, gifts and passions that strengthen a church community to achieve measurable goals. United Methodists are known for what John Wesley called "holy conferencing": intentional organizing through dialogue and commitment to action. As you decide who will work with your church and society team, prayerfully consider:

- Who has a vision for peace and justice in your congregation?
- Is your team diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and economic privilege?
- Are there people outside your congregation that need to be invited to join your church and society team?
- What are the vocational talents and professional skills each person brings to the team?
- What are the gifts God has given each person?
- How will you organize your team?
- Will you organize yourselves around stated passions or by agreed upon group priorities?
- What form of leadership and decision making will you employ?
- Who will communicate the vision and measurable goals of your church and society team?
- How will you measure and celebrate the faithfulness of your church and society team's work?

SIX THINGS YOU CAN DO TODAY (IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY)

1. Tend your spiritual life and growth, praying for God's guidance in ministries, living faith, and seeking justice.
2. Sign up to receive the GBCS periodic Washington briefing and action letter *Faith in Action*. Go to www.umc-gbcs.org/fia to see recent copies and to register.

3. Sign up to be part of the *UMPower* action alert network at www.umpower.org. You will receive GBCS Action Alerts and updates on those issues important to you and be informed about how to take action at critical times. Networks include:
 - Peace with Justice
 - Environmental Justice
 - Child Advocacy (Domestic and International)
 - Alcohol and Other Addictions
 - Economic Justice
 - Health and Wholeness
 - Civil and Human Rights
 - Women and Population
 - United Methodists Against the Death Penalty
 - United Nations/International Affairs
4. Read and study the United Methodist Social Principles and teach them to fellow church members. Include the Social Principles in new membership training and confirmation classes.
5. Bring a seminar group to Washington, DC, to participate in a UM Seminar exploring a particular justice issue in depth. Call 202-488-5600 for more information.
6. Become informed about current public policy issues and think about them from a faith perspective. Also, take time to think about causes and effects. When you hear or read a story, think to yourself: What would motivate them to do or say that? What is the story behind the story? Read and think critically.

Build a Support Network

You don't have to go it alone! Church and Society ministry can be a lonely business. Many local churches have not yet caught a vision for the local church as an outpost of ministry advocating for change in a broken world. It is important that we find people to support us in our efforts, people to journey with us. Who are the people who give you that type of support? How can you connect with them regularly so you can avoid burnout?

Your annual conference Board of Church and Society may also provide support to the work of the local church board. Call your conference office to find out who your conference board chair is and what their priorities are for the upcoming year. How can you support their efforts, and how can they be of support to you?

Solicit help from others in your local church who you know would be interested in the type of ministry Church and Society offers. Are there people passionate about caring for the environment? Sign them up! Are there people concerned about the needs of the poor and working for changes in the structures that perpetuate poverty? They would be great recruits! Are there young people eager to work to change the world? Let them know that there is room for them on your team! Many people are looking for a place in the church where they can put their passion to work. Church and Society can be just the type of community that can put faith into action.

Finally, we must remember that Church and Society ministry, like all ministries is, at its core, a spiritual work. Our best efforts fall short if they are done in our own strength. We need God's help. Surround your team and your work in prayer. Seek the wisdom and blessing of God. Take time to listen.

A Success Story!

A few years ago a group of concerned United Methodists in the state of Arkansas realized that their state's poorest citizens, those earning minimum wage or something close to it had not received a raise in almost ten years. It seemed that everyone else's wages were rising each year at least to keep up with inflation, but Arkansas' poorest workers continued to work at the minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. The wage never increased, year after year.

A coalition of people led by a United Methodist minister, the Rev. Steve Copley, decided they had to do something to raise the minimum wage. They came together and found that they had some strong partners for the task: the conference board of church and society, the bishop, United Methodist Women, other denominational partner churches, the Arkansas Council of Churches, and labor unions. There were also a number of business leaders who wanted to pay higher wages but who were being undercut by low-wage employers. These leaders all agreed that the minimum wage, \$10,700 for a full-time worker who never takes a day off, was far from adequate and should be raised at least \$1 per hour. They also agreed that the minimum wage should be indexed to inflation so that each year people earning minimum wage would get at least a cost of living increase.

There were some within the state, one can imagine, who saw such talk as a threat to their profit margins: Raising wages for the state's lowest paid workers would be a hit to their financial bottom line. Talk of raising the minimum wage was threatening. The campaign determined that the Congress would not act on the issue and that the best approach would be to present gathered signatures and a referendum directly to the citizens of Arkansas. Volunteers hit the streets and began collecting the thousands of signatures needed to get a referendum on the ballot.

The campaign got a big boost when it was given a \$7,000 grant to conduct a survey asking citizens in Arkansas if they believed the minimum wage should be raised by \$1 an hour for the state's lowest paid workers. This was one of the best \$7,000 ever spent as the survey indicated that an overwhelming majority of Arkansans said "yes." The success of the survey put the issue high on the state's agenda. Congressional leaders met with campaign leaders and agreed to a compromise proposal. Then the Congress quickly acted to raise the minimum wage by \$1 per hour.

The governor signed the bill and the wage was raised. Many people said this would never happen. Many felt that Arkansas was not a state that would take the lead nationally in raising the minimum wage. But because a group of church leaders and their community partners felt a strong urging to take on this issue, the political pundits were proven wrong.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY?

"Since low wages are often a cause of poverty, employers should pay their employees a wage that does not require them to depend upon government subsidies such as food stamps or welfare for their livelihood." (United Methodist Social Principles ¶163.IV.E)

MORE SUCCESS STORIES

How do ordinary local churches, boards of church and society and local leaders do extraordinary things? Here are just a few examples of what is possible.

Led by Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede at Dietz Memorial UMC, a 65-member congregation in downtown Omaha, launched the Blue Flamingo, a multi-faceted neighborhood-based no-profit that includes a thrift store, fair trade, community garden, literacy and arts programming.

The Fair Trade Market started four years ago at Manchester United Methodist Church with a handful of volunteers, a few tables of items and a big desire. Today the market has become the largest, annual, all-volunteer Fair Trade Market in the US and a widely anticipated event in the St. Louis metropolitan area. In four years the market has grown over 700 percent from \$10,000 in gross sales to \$71,000 in gross sales with 5,000+ shopping visitors during this annual 4-day market. More important, upwards of 400 volunteers catch the Fair Trade spirit each year, making this event a life-saving reality. Goods sold at the market are created by developing world artisans that would otherwise be underemployed or unemployed. On average, gross retail sales of \$3,500 in Fair Trade provide a developing-world artisan and their family of four or more with quality of life income for the

course of a full year. The gains are a life of dignity and worth, without charity, earning fair pay for fair work. For the family this often means more than one meal a day, a chance for children to attend school, access to healthcare, work in safe, healthy environments away from sweatshops, and the ability to smile with pride for a job well done.

Kellee K. Sikes, Founder of the largest Fair Trade Market in the US and social entrepreneur, led the social justice ministry at Manchester United Methodist Church. Under her leadership the congregation's interest and passion for justice grew exponentially from one ministry doing many small projects and one big market, to five ministries that include the JustFaith justice education foundation classes; the annual Fair Trade Market; the monthly sales of Fair Trade Coffee and Fair Trade coffee at fellowship times; Justice Advocates, an activist task force currently creating a social justice speaker series and related discussion and activity points; and the Ulster Ministry focused on reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant youth from Ireland.

People are marginalized in large part because they do not know how to mobilize the power of their voice and vote. Rev. Glen "Chebon" Kernell, Jr., serves as senior pastor of the Norman First American United Methodist Church in Norman, Oklahoma, and has orchestrated the "Rock the Vote Campaign," an effort to use music and celebration to encourage young voter and Native American voter registration.

Trish Merrill founded Faith Partners, which merged with the Rush Center of the Johnson Institute. Faith Partners is a step-by-step approach to initiating a lay ministry to address both prevention of alcohol and drug problems and addiction recovery support.

Many Christians catch their first glimpse of the kingdom of God on a mission trip. With time apart to seek and serve God, they experience the power of Christ's presence. Too often, however, trip participants miss an important dimension of the kingdom: God's call to contribute to the building of a more just world. When Hurricane Katrina hit at the start of his second year of ministry, Rev. Cory Sparks, Ph.D., led a team of pastors responsible for five churches in the New Orleans Mission Zone to develop strategies for mission workers. These strategies include encouraging missionaries to recognize Christ's presence in the community and in the people they meet; respect the people they serve and their leadership abilities; understand the social dynamics of race, class, and gender in the mission context; move beyond mercy to justice by catching a vision of God's transforming power in a community; and identify ways to support communities through political advocacy and other justice work.

Getting Started

Read the United Methodist Discipline to understand what it says about the ministry of Church and Society.

Recruit a team of at least three others to work with you.

Study this Guideline booklet with your team.

Talk over your assignment with your pastor, the previous committee leader, and other leaders in your congregation.

Get to know the team: their passions, concerns, interests, and prior experience.

Get to know your church: perhaps through a survey or interviews.

Contact district and conference Church and Society leaders and see how you can support one another.

Get to know your community. Who are the key leaders? What are your strong points? What are the biggest challenges? Read the local paper. Talk with people in the community who work with people who are most in need: teachers, social workers, people who give assistance, business leaders, police officers. Who are your allies? Who can get things done?

Offer periodic studies for the church that will raise awareness about the church's Social Principles and the needs of Church and Society. These can be simple introductions and discussions, or they may be more in-depth studies with guest speakers. Include in the studies times of both prayer and action.

Prioritize. Don't try to do everything at once. Narrow your initial focus. Begin with something local, an issue important in your own community.

Think of ways the issue can become part of the other church's ministries of worship, education, outreach and witness. Perhaps these ways might be through a special offering? a youth mission project? a children's sermon? an offering of letters that would be mailed to a key legislator?

Resources

The website for the General Board of Church and Society, www.umcgbcs.org

Social Principles booklets, to order visit the General Board of Church and Society website

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, in particular, the sections on local church ministry and General Board of Church and Society

The *Book of Resolutions* published after each General Conference Session, available from Cokesbury.

Justice in Everyday Life by Howard J. Mason and Neal Christie (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN: 9780881774917); instruction on how to teach the Social Principles

“Living Faithfully,” series published by Cokesbury

Your district office. Many districts have a district church and society committee or equivalent. Find out how you can support one another.

Your annual conference office. Get to know the staff person assigned to church and society issues for your conference.

National Council of Churches in Christ, www.nccc.org

Sojourners, www.sojo.net

Ecumenical Advocacy Days, an annual gathering hosted each spring in Washington, DC, and supported by a number of the Washington denominational offices and the National Council of Churches in Christ, www.advocacydays.org

CHURCH AND SOCIETY COALITION PARTNERS

You are called to work as a leader in coalition with others in the church and society. Some coalitions to consider partnering with in your area are:

- Coalition for the Prevention of Alcohol Problems
- Tobacco Free Kids
- Faith United Against Tobacco
- Corporate Accountability International (formerly Infact)

- Inter-Religious Coalition on Smoking or Health
- National Coalition Alliance to Prevent Underage Drinking
- National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling
- National Coalition on Health Care
- Partners for Effective Tobacco Policy
- Pathways to Promise
- Universal Health Care Action Network
- Ecumenical Eco-Justice Network
- Fair Labor Association
- Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility
- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
- National Farm Worker Ministry
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- National Neighborhood Coalition
- National Youth Employment Coalition
- Rural Coalition
- Child Labor Coalition
- Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
- Global AIDS Alliance
- Global Health Council
- Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty
- Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- American NGO Coalition for the International Criminal Court
- Center on Conscience and War
- Churches for Middle East Peace
- Citizens Trade Campaign
- Jubilee USA Network
- Save Darfur Coalition
- UN Association-USA Council of Organizations
- National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
- State Councils of Churches

SUGGESTED VIDEOS

Forged by Fire (45 minutes with discussion guide included): Tells the stories of United Methodists of color and the strength they have found in their church communities while enduring times of oppression. Available from EcuFilm.

Out of Egypt: The Exodus Experience (71 minutes): A virtual pilgrimage to the holy land, this DVD is an intimate encounter with a people's geography and history, cultural rituals, and religious narratives, their sacred architecture and ethnic identities. Available from EcuFilm.

UNITED METHODIST SEMINARS ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

GBCS seminars have been enriching lives for generations and can be a vital part of your church's Church and Society ministry.

These seminars are educational, interactive, faith forming, thought provoking, and fun. Each seminar is tailor-made for each group. The group selects the topic and the seminar design team at GBCS creates a seminar to answer questions, challenge assumptions, and open the group to reflection on the chosen issues. Some of recent topics include hunger, immigration, peace, racism, and health care.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the seminars, which are engaging for any age group, from youth to adult.

Washington, DC, Seminars take place at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, adjacent to the Supreme Court and the United States Capitol Building. UN seminars take place at the Church Center for the United Nations across the street from the United Nations headquarters. Often, seminars include "field trips" to places that connect participants to the seminar theme.

Interested in learning more about seminars?

For Washington Seminars sponsored by General Board of Church and Society call 202-488-5609.

For United Nations Seminars sponsored by the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, call 212-682-3633.

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